



The Pride of Mankind

By Carey Rutherford

Sometimes, being different isn't so different.

As the not-so-different Boysen Hodgson says, "You get the same experience (as everyone else in New Warrior Training): it's the same protocols that we put on for anyone, the difference being that most of the facilitators are gay, bi or trans."

Boysen Hodgson, of The Mankind Project USA, is describing opportunities that have been organized for this personal development weekend, most famously parodied in Disney/Pixar's *Finding Nemo* (2003) ("SharkBait! Boo-ha-hal!"). The name may seem gender-specific for men, and indeed it is. The interesting idea here is that it's not sexuality-specific.

"The Project is still 75-80% heterosexual demographically, but it's very much dependent upon where you are in the country: how 'out' is the culture in that given area?"

Mankind Pride, as the alternative trainings are called, are an offshoot of the original Mankind Project. It has its origins in 1985 as a response to the sixties' and seventies' feminist movement, basically asking, *what about men?*

As their website describes, "The ManKind Project is a global not for profit organization that conducts challenging and highly rewarding trainings for men at every stage of life. We help men through any transition, men at all levels of success, men facing almost any challenge... We strive to be increasingly inclusive and affirming of cultural differences, especially with respect to color, class, sexual orientation, faith, age, ability, ethnicity, and nationality."

This may sound ambitious for a few days spent without any female accompaniment. Can a group of males get together for an entire weekend and still be constructive? According to the Mankind Project line, yes! "[MKP is] a new way of being for men...and the hope for creating a new culture out of that new way of being for humanity."

Boysen tries to explain these lofty goals. "We look pretty honestly and fully at all aspects of a man's life during the training weekend, and the baseline is, we're men. Then it's about levels of distinction: what does that mean to you? Being in a circle with gay men, when I got through my own internal homophobia, processed my own stuff..." He hesitates, then continues, "what becomes clear is that, *holy cow, there's so much more in common than there is difference.* From what I've been told, that can be an incredible eye-opener for a homosexual man, to say, *holy shit, these straight guys, they're carrying around the same fears that I'm carrying; the same insecurities that I am. They have the same vulnerability: they cry like I do, they laugh like I do,*

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they rage like I do. And it boils down to that level where we can connect.”

“The (Mankind Pride) Gateways are about creating spaces for men who know that it is going to be very difficult for them to overcome that level of basic perceived safety, entering into a container with a lot of heterosexual men... But once a man goes through the training, he’s then invited to become (if he chooses to) a part of the community. Once you enter into that space, it’s all of us; one big circle.”

Enter Mark Riser, volunteer with nearly a dozen New Warrior Training weekends, and Terry Syvenky, a newbie who began his version of this adventure in October of 2011. As Terry says, “It’s the nature of people to expand and explore, and we think it’s really important for our community to know that, when the time comes to do some work, that they can find an organization that will actually affirm them and accept them, and celebrate them as a gay man. That being a man has nothing to do with your sexual orientation.

“We all know that, when the sign says ‘Everyone Welcome’, that is not always the case. So when an organization like the Mankind Project makes this unequivocally clear, in their written materials and in the language that the facilitators use during the weekend, I want people to know about it.”

Mark mentions the personal obstacles he started to overcome after discovering the training weekend in 2007, in Vancouver. He acknowledges that when he was young, “I wasn’t accepted. For me, it was my family...and that has impacted my ability to be social, to trust others, or to have healthy relationships.

“When I went to this MKP weekend (in 2007), for the first time I felt like I belonged, and had men accept me, and embrace me, and care for me. And challenge me in a way that I’ve never experienced before. I went through my

whole childhood up until I was about 28 without having any meaningful connections, and very few with men. Whereas now I have many male friends, and really feel like I can trust the men in my life.”

Mark also mentions, as a veteran facilitator promoting his passion, that there are weekly MKP circles in both Edmonton and Calgary, and that there are two training weekends coming up. One is a sample of the all-gay kind of MankindPride, in Tucson, Arizona (March 30th - April 1st), and the other, standard version weekend, is in Gull Lake, Alberta (May 11th - 13th).

A so-far unexplored aspect of non-discriminatory inclusion is the changing demographics of the MKP participants. As Boysen mentions, “Age is definitely shifting. Our median age for men coming into the Project is around 45, but, depending on the community that you are in, the age is going down. As an example, in New England, in one of our trainings we had last year, 40% of the staff were under 35, and more than 40% of the participants were under 35.” A statistic which reflects the ages of Mark and Terry.

The times they are a-changing, but in a good way. The question is if this change is for you. 🌈



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